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Volume 25, 2010 - [Issue 5-6: Special Edition: Looking Back on New Labour](#)

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Pages 397-405 | Published online: 24 Nov 2010

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VIEWPOINT

Looking Back in Order to Move Forward: The Politics of Evolving Sub-National Economic Policy Architecture

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Introduction

Based on insights ‘in the English field’ over the past decade, I take a brief look back at New Labour’s economic policy architecture as a means to postulate on its reconfiguration under the incumbent Liberal Democrat–Conservative (Lib-Con) Coalition Government. In particular, I reflect on my time devising spatial policy, economic strategies and regeneration programmes at national, regional and local spatial scales, to consider the transition from a New Labour regionalist approach (epitomised by Regional Development Agencies) to a Lib-Con purported localism approach (embodied in the proposed Local Enterprise Partnerships).¹ I conclude by expressing some personal concerns that the dismantling of existing regional economic architecture is akin to throwing the baby out with the bath-water. Alongside this, I contend that in the haste to set-up Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Coalition Government may be in danger of reinventing the wheel.

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¹ A coalition agreement to govern the UK was struck between the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives in May 2010.

ISSN 0269-0942 Print/ISSN 1470-9325 Online/10/05-060397-9 © 2010, LEPU, South Bank University
DOI: 10.1080/02690942.2010.525972

Notes

¹ A coalition agreement to govern the UK was struck between the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives in May 2010.

RDAAs have received funding through a Single Programme budget (known as the 'single pot') since April 2002.

³ The present sponsor for RDAAs is the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

⁴ One only has to take a glance at each of the nine RDAAs' corporate plans, investment priorities and plethora of strategies, to appreciate that they have an extensive remit, but, arguably of more interest, is each RDAAs spatially-flavoured economic development approach. Some have prioritised place quality enhancements and physical regeneration, whilst others have looked to innovation or enterprise, which is reflected in the organisational structures of each RDA, with some opting to utilise local delivery partners more than others.

⁵ At the time of writing in September 2010, it is anticipated that some activities, such as inward investment, innovation and business support, will be 'led' nationally, however, it remains to be seen whether implementation would be led from a single national base.

⁶ The letter is available at:

http://centreforcities.typepad.com/centre_for_cities/2010/06/cablepickles-letter-on-local-enterprise-partnerships.html (accessed 2 July 2010).

⁷ See Pugalis ([2009c](#)) for an analysis of the evolving relationship between these tripartite regional bodies.

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